

Imperial Measures

A ruler functions as a recurring marker and indexical sign of image production in the work of Jane and Louise Wilson. The starting point was research at the Stanley Kubrick Archive in 2008, where the artists came across some visual material from the Ealing Film Studios. Photographs from the 1930s and 1940s depict evidence of Second World War bomb damage and interiors for set design in which rulers a yard long painted in black and white are placed. Yardsticks are now obsolete because of technological developments in film production and, not least, their reference to the British Imperial System of Measurement: to the yard (equivalent to 0.9144 metres / 36 inches).

In the sisters' sculptural works, the yardstick is an autonomous, monumentalized object cast in bronze or aluminium, made of wood or enamelled. Some casts correspond to a yard 1:1 while others are scaled. Different sizes are placed next to each other; objective measurability turns out to be an instrument of colonial control and universality. The Wilsons' rulers are physical manifestations of pure abstractions.

The yardstick appears in installations as well as photographs and collages. In the Wilsons' work it highlights the human imperative to measure and standardize, but also points to the constructivist abstractions of the Russian Avant-garde and their utopian dimension. The photo collage series *Imperial Measures* in the archive room is based on archival images from the Kiev National Film Archive, which document life in the vicinity of the Chernobyl atomic power station and the purpose-built city of Pripyat. The historical photographs, which range from inside reactor 4 to technical overviews and everyday scenes, have been altered by hand by the artists. The yardstick pinpoints the modern universal demand for rationalisation, order and control – along with its progressive demise.

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